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HAS THE GOSPEL OF THE REFORMATION BECOME ANTIQUATED?

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WHAT is the gospel of the Reformation? Among evangelical Christians this ought really to be an entirely superfluous question. For did not Luther himself define the gospel, times without number, simply as the glad tidings of Christ our Savior, who died for us and rose again that he might redeem from sin and death all who believe in his name? And was not the gospel to him always identical with the promise of the remission of sins through the merits of Christ? It is this note of gospel-truth, indeed, which pervades our hymns and books of devotion. Nay, more than that, it is in this sense that every schoolboy is taught the gospel. And yet I find it necessary, to my regret, first and foremost to defend this conception of the gospel against a two-fold opposition.

This opposition to the conception of the gospel indicated above is raised, not only in the name of the modern science of history, but also in the name of scriptural authority, interpreted according to the old doctrine of inspiration. It will serve my purpose best to begin with the first of these two classes of objections.

It is claimed that the gospel of the Reformation cannot be adequately characterized or defined in terms which either disregard or entirely efface the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of that age; that the spirit of modern times finds nothing congenial earlier than the beginning of the eighteenth century. This point of time is held to be the dividing line, the boundary beyond which everything bears the stamp of a bygone age, not merely in old-fashioned and easily separable externals, but even more in those things which constitute its very nature and essential being. And thus, it is said, Luther's conception of the gospel must of necessity be inseparable from his mediæval notions of the devil's domination and power on the earth; inseparable from his views, shaped by the current mythology, of Christ's struggle with the law, with death, and the devil; inseparable from his ideas concerning penances, vicarious suffering, and the tyranny of the law — ideas entirely foreign and unintelligible to us, save in the light of the conditions then prevailing; inseparable, moreover, from the narrowness of his pre-Copernican view of history, which was fixed by the old doctrine of inspiration, erroneous exegetical traditions concerning the Old Testament, and legendary traditions concerning an everywhere uniform preaching of the apostles.

In considering such objections as these the fact must, to be sure, be conceded that the endeavor to understand the men of the past as children of their own time, and to judge them in the light of their surroundings, the *milieu* in which they lived, is an advance in modern historical investigation. For, indeed, Luther was not a Lutheran of the kind of those who boast that they, in contrast to others, still acknowledge the *entire* Luther as their teacher. Notwithstanding I have no sympathy whatever with that historical work which, though basing itself upon the correct method I have just referred to, fancies that in its pictures the colorings of place and time cannot be laid on too thickly, and which seems in its representations to aim above all things else at emphasizing the distance of time which separates us from the past. To be sure, this statement of my position is in no sense a refutation. Even if a thousand others should, like

myself, feel themselves repelled by this pseudo-realistic art of historic representation, it would still be true that feelings have no place in argumentation. For it belongs to the dignity of truth that she never allows herself to be fretted by sentimental considerations; a self-sacrificing servant of her austere majesty will gladly suffer the martyrdom of being decried as impious or irreverent. But it is not only feelings and moods with which I am occupied. They are merely the sentimental expression of the resentment which I feel at the false results attained. And my conviction that the results are false is based upon the most unmistakable evidence. If history were nothing more than a gallery of disconnected pictures, then this pseudo-realism, even if not less in the wrong, would at all events be somewhat less open to attack. But history is more than that. To array right against wrong in brief terms which shall not be liable to a false interpretation is on this point doubtless a difficult task; but a comparison may serve to illustrate my meaning. Anyone who is at all familiar with original prints of Luther's works or their exact reproductions knows that his German differs, at least in orthography, in about every third word from the German of today. In a critical and complete edition of Luther's writings, and wherever the interests of German philology require consideration, it is right and proper that his language and orthography should be reproduced with critical accuracy. But it would be folly for a modern historian, writing for a larger circle and wishing to give his readers a sample of Luther's masterly manipulation of the German language, to insert such quotations in exactly their original form. It would be quite impossible for the modern reader to recognize the characteristic elements of his style under this strange disguise. And the essayist who, in dealing with Luther's place in the history of German literary style, should declare that the peculiarities of Luther's language which are due to the period in which he wrote are inseparably bound up with its stylistic characteristics, and who should therefore endeavor, with the utmost philological accuracy, to catalogue all forms and expressions which might seem strange to us, would simply make himself utterly ridiculous. A Chinaman might consider such an

essay a triumph of scholarly care and exactness; one who understands modern German would judge differently. For the language which we speak today is to such an extent the same language which Luther spoke that the question as to what constituted the characteristics of his rhetoric and of his style scarcely necessitates the consideration of the differences between the German of our day and that of the Saxon court of the sixteenth century. We find an analogous case when we examine the history of the Christian faith. None of the Christian centuries has so exclusively sung its own melody that certain of its notes cannot be said to be even today ringing in the hearts of all believers; and Luther's piety is still intelligible to thousands and tens of thousands of evangelical Christians, not indeed in a few isolated notes, but in a far larger measure. He who writes history should not only take into account the distance of time which separates the centuries, but should also duly emphasize the bonds of unity which bind them together. In scientific monographs it is altogether in place to give due prominence to the strange background of the pictures which are being painted, although even then only on condition that the writer does not forget that the background must be worked up in paler colors and less sharply outlined in its details than the real subject of the picture. This concession does not, however, apply to the presentation of historical development, particularly when for practical purposes the writer attempts to draw a picture of the past for men of the present. It is true, of course, that the prominence given to the difference of *milieu* existing between two periods of time does not obscure their kinship for one who knows, not only the scenery of both stages, but also all the intervening scene-shifts, and who rightly estimates the significance of such differences. But how few periods of time are known to us in all their phases! How small is the number of modern readers who are fully equipped with knowledge of this kind! And how often, to retain the metaphor, does the lover of historically accurate scenery overestimate the value of such scenery! Whenever a historian emphasizes the dissimilarities of different ages in such a way that the elements which they

possess in common are thereby rendered less clear than their importance would warrant, historical caricatures, or at best distorted photographs, and not faithfully drawn pictures, are the result. For a reading public which does not possess a general knowledge of culture-history the historian must not only modernize antiquated word-forms in his citations, but also in many other places do the work of a translator.

It may, indeed, be objected that the very thing which I have advanced as a counter-argument is open to doubt; that the contention that the Christian centuries are linked together by a considerable identity of Christian faith is a debatable proposition; and that I am therefore taking for granted what I wish to prove when I say that Luther's piety is, in a very large measure, still intelligible to the present generation. I have, indeed, actually encountered this objection. And on this point, I must confess, it is difficult to argue. If anyone should controvert the statement that Luther's German is at the present day and in its essentials still capable of being understood, I could offer nothing to substantiate my statement other than my own experience and the similar experience to which others testify. And so, in the present case, Luther's catechism, his hymns, entire passages in his sermons and writings have been directly edifying to me, and that before I was in a position to understand them historically; and that this experience of mine coincides with that of thousands of others is proven by Rade's *Luther*, the Braunschweig edition of Luther's works for the Christian home, and many other evidences. If, therefore, anyone sees fit to call in question the fact thus attested, namely, that Luther's piety still appeals to the present age, with such a one I cannot argue. But neither am I taking for granted what I wish to prove, for as yet I have not so much as hinted at the extent to which Luther's piety is today intelligible, and not until I raise this question do I come to that which I have to prove. This only have I premised as an incontestable fact that a considerable measure of intelligibility still exists, and all that I have thus far attempted to substantiate by this fact is that in discussions addressed to men of the present day, and aimed at practical results rather than at

scientific accuracy, it is the exact opposite of real historical fidelity to burden the conception of the gospel of the Reformation with all those peculiarities which attached themselves to it in the minds of men of the sixteenth century.

In defining the gospel of the Reformation, the question *which* of these peculiarities may be overlooked without detracting from historical accuracy in no way anticipates the answer to the question of my theme: in what relation the gospel thus defined stands to the present age. It is correct, of course, to say that because the definition may and must, according to what I have just demonstrated, disregard some details due to the conditions of the time, it is not altogether without prejudicating significance; and for this reason I must dwell upon it a little longer. The task of such definition is more complicated than it may seem. If, as I have shown above, it is wrong to burden the conception of the gospel of the Reformation with all those peculiarities attaching to it in the sixteenth century, it would, on the other hand, be quite as unconscientious on the part of the historian to endeavor to determine the nature of this gospel by discarding all those elements that might appear to the modern man, or to any type of that genus, as antiquated sixteenth-century views. Again, for the avoidance of this second error, the above-quoted illustration from Luther's German furnishes a valuable hint. How little would remain if, in determining the characteristics of his style, we should disregard everything in his language that presents a sixteenth-century coloring! All those elements pertaining to the language of the sixteenth century which are connected only externally, and not essentially, with the peculiarities of his style, these, and these only, may be regarded as irrelevant in determining the characteristic qualities of his style and rhetoric. For a single word may be highly characteristic, while the entire sentence structure may sometimes be irrelevant. No mechanical rule can be laid down for one who wishes to present to modern Germans the characteristic elements of Luther's language relieved of the ballast of nonessential sixteenth-century idiosyncrasies. One who does not understand German thoroughly, and who is not equipped with a keen linguistic sense, is incompetent for

such a task. And so it is in determining the definition of the gospel of the Reformation. That which constituted the central interest in Luther's understanding of it must be taken as the starting-point. Everything that stands in constant and inner connection therewith—that is, everything which regularly appears in connection with it, and evidently belongs to Luther's inmost conception of it—is inseparable from the conception of the gospel of the Reformation. All things else constitute only its temporary garb, the *Zeitgewand*, and not its essence. But there is no mechanical rule for the elimination of these nonessentials. A historic sense must here coöperate with a fine appreciation of the specific elements of evangelical piety as it exists today.

Evangelium est proprie promissio remissionis et justificationis propter Christum, says the Apologia of the Augustana (67, 43); and none, I fancy, will controvert that. But it is an undeniable fact that in this definition, given by Melanchthon and quoted with almost indefinite frequency in a similar form by Luther, "Christus" is introduced as a known quantity.

Now arises the question, which of the representations of Christ's life, of his person, and of his work shall be included in the conception of the gospel of the Reformation, and which shall not. And this question can be decided only by the test of constant and inner connection. On occasion and in the interest of vital piety Luther has brought all the religious ideas of his time which he took up into an inner connection with his conception of the gospel. It will not suffice, therefore, to base the decision upon the fact that there is an inner connection. Only a constant inner connection can be decisive. Now, the following is beyond all doubt, beyond all need of proof: (1) that many of Luther's representations of the life, the person, and the work of Christ have their origin entirely in the fact that Luther accepted as indisputable everything that is narrated by the Holy Scripture, and, furthermore, that he interpreted the Scriptures according to the standard of mediæval traditions which he had retained; (2) that this valuation of the Scriptures as the *verbaliter* inspired word of God, and certainly his acceptance of erroneous mediæval

traditions concerning Scripture interpretation, do not stand in any constant inner connection with his central thought. Everything, therefore, even in his christological representations, which originates solely in this valuation of the Scriptures, either directly or, inasmuch as the then prevailing interpretation of Scripture seemed to support many old theological traditions, indirectly, I regard as the temporary garb of the gospel of the Reformation. But to this does not belong his conviction that in the Holy Scripture we hear the word of God addressed to man, and that his Holy Spirit generates faith in us through the word; nor does it include his estimation of Christ's death as the act performed for our salvation; nor his belief in the resurrection of Christ; nor yet his view of Christ as the *deus revelatus*. For in Luther these four elements stand in such constant and inner connection with the *promissio remissionis peccatorum* that each one of the thoughts—"The word shall they leave unassailed," "Given for you," "Christ is risen," "God revealed in Christ"—became for him on more than one occasion a distinguishing mark of the gospel. Thus Melanchthon expresses himself in his Apologia (279, 13): "*Diximus in confessione remissionem peccatorum gratis accipi propter Christum per fidem. Si hæc non est ipsa evangelii vox, si non est sententia Patris æterni, quam tu qui es in sinu Patris revelasti mundo, jure plectimur. Sed tua mors testis est, tua resurrectio testis est, spiritus sanctus testis est, tota ecclesia tua testis est, vere hanc esse evangelii sententiam.*" The powerful and sure testimony of the church to which Melanchthon here appeals extends beyond his time down to the present day. In defining the content of the gospel of the Reformation in the manner above indicated, I can appeal to the testimony of our hymns and books of devotion, in short, to everything that pertains to genuine evangelical faith, as evidenced through the entire course of the last three centuries and a half in the hearts and lives of thousands. *The gospel of the Reformation is the message of God to our humanity, offering us justification only through faith in Jesus Christ the Savior, in whom the eternal God has revealed himself to the world in the life of a human person by whose death and resurrection he has redeemed us from sin and death.* This definition I can advance with a clear

conscience, in the face of all criticism to which it may be subjected in the name of the modern science of history.

Can I have a clear conscience toward those also who declare this definition to be too meager, and who, on the basis of scriptural authority interpreted according to the old doctrine of inspiration, desire to see all the details of the second article of the Apostles' Creed and of its explanation by Luther incorporated into the conception of the gospel of the Reformation? I think so. But, let me postpone for the present the justification of this confidence—which, in the face of the clamor for clear dogmatic formulas concerning the work of Christ and divine revelation, I nevertheless hold—in order that I may first of all dispose of another matter, which has, however, three phases. In the name of Scripture authority the demand is made that we include in the conception of the gospel (*a*) the “born of the virgin Mary;” (*b*) the ascension as a distinct event, separated from the resurrection by a period of forty days—it is only as such that it comes into account here; that the resurrection is inconceivable without a subsequent ascension I concede; (*c*) our redemption “out of the power of the devil.” No doubt Luther included all three in the glad tidings of Christ. Is it, nevertheless, possible without insincerity to espouse the cause of the gospel of the Reformation without including in it these three elements? Most assuredly. It is not only justifiable, but also a twofold duty, not to confuse the conception of the gospel with these three things.

It is justifiable. For it is not a mere matter of chance that Luther, in giving the content of the gospel, very often makes no mention of the virgin-birth and the ascension. Witness his well-known words: “St. John's gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul's epistles, particularly to the Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, and the first epistle of St. Peter—these are the books which show you the Christ and teach you all things whatsoever that are needful and blessed for your knowledge, even though you should never see nor hear any other book or teaching.”¹ Now, it would

¹ “Johannis Evangelium, und seine erste Epistel, S. Paulus Epistel, sonderlich die zu den Römern, Galatern, Ephesern, und S. Peters erste Epistel, das sind die Bücher

be entirely erroneous, of course, if one should attempt to deduce from the words just quoted that Luther thereby declared the virgin-birth and the ascension on the fortieth day to be matters immaterial. In writing those words he has not in mind the fact that the books of Scripture which he named make no mention of either. Indeed, it is altogether probable that he would have disputed the fact, on the ground of the traditionally biased exegesis of his time. But the passages concerning the content of the "gospel," in which he mentions neither virgin-birth nor ascension, demonstrate this fact, namely, that Luther arrived at a firm assertion of these things, not in the course of his thought about the "gospel," but solely on the basis of Scripture authority. And, therefore, even those who are convinced of the actuality of the virgin-birth and of the ascension on the fortieth day must concede that these biblical narratives do not belong to the "gospel" in the restricted sense of the term. Otherwise we should have to consider the salvation of a Christian maiden seriously jeopardized by her failure to understand the *natus ex virgine*.

Luther's conceptions of the devil and his dominion present a somewhat different aspect. In Luther's mind, and according to his perception, these ideas doubtless stand in a constant and close connection, even though it is not invariably expressed; and, if we disregard the massive mediæval form with which he invested them, they may claim the consensus of New Testament Scripture. But is the connection of these ideas with the *promissio remissionis* really an inner one? On the contrary, is not the fact that his inner experience of salvation from sin and death presented itself to Luther as a salvation also from the devil merely a coloring derived from the time—a *Zeitfarbe*, a result of the external influence of Scripture and of church traditions? Even Luther, in spite of his assertion that he had seen the devil, was directly concerned only with sin and death, and with the temptation of the world and of his own flesh. And so it is today.

die dir Christum zeigen und alles lehren das dir zu wissen not und selig ist, ob du schon kein ander Buch noch Lehre nimmer sehest noch hörest." (*Luthers Werke*, Erlanger Ausg., 63, 115.)

The question whether there is behind sin and death a personal power opposed to God is unessential to faith in the salvation from sin and death. Therefore, in speaking of the gospel at the present time and for practical purposes, we are justified in leaving out of consideration these conceptions, also, of the devil and his dominion.

Indeed, such a reservation is here, just as in the case of the virgin-birth and ascension on the fortieth day, a duty—and for two reasons. In the first place, because no well-informed and at the same time honest and conscientious theologian can deny that he who asserts these things as indisputable facts affirms what is open to grave doubts. I am well aware that orthodoxy charges the fostering of such doubts to a certain prejudice against miracles. I have no such prejudice; indeed, I consider the existence of a personal power of sin as entirely credible, and have personally no object or interest whatever in believing Matt. 1: 18 ff., Luke, chap. 2, and Acts, chap. 1, to be unhistorical. Therefore I am in a position to say how unjustifiable this convenient argument is. It is no more to be justified than would be the charge that the position of orthodoxy is determined by intellectual laziness or ignorance, or even by motives of church policy. Anyone who understands anything about historical criticism must concede that the virgin-birth and the ascension on the fortieth day belong to the least credible of New Testament traditions. Of course, it is a very easy matter to cover up all the difficulties which may arise in connection with the criticism of original sources by simply applying the old doctrine of inspiration. But the covering is riddled and full of holes. The old doctrine of inspiration has fallen; it is not sustained by even a single passage of the symbols of the church, and no modernizing of it can obscure the obligation which devolves upon historical criticism in relation to the biblical narratives. For this very reason it becomes a duty to refrain from flatly declaring the scriptural representations of the devil's dominion to be "revelations." Through prophets and apostles, even through our Lord himself, God has revealed his eternal truth to us in the temporal garb of the time in which the bearer of this revelation lived. If

we assert, then, that the belief in the existence of a demoniacal kingdom is more than a conception of the times—a conception unessential to salvation, which was accepted just as much as a matter of course in the time of Christ and of Luther as was the geocentric theory—if we assert this, what firm ground shall we have upon which to base our assertion? I readily concede that, in spite of these serious doubts, the demonological representations of the Scriptures *may* be more than the ideas of those old times; I can concede, too, that the accounts of the virgin-birth and the ascension on the fortieth day, even though emanating from sources of doubtful credibility, are not necessarily unhistorical; but something that *may* be real, that *may* not be unhistorical, must not be set up as an integral part of the gospel, demanding a faith “so firm that for it one would die a thousand deaths” (Luther, Erlanger Ausgabe, 63, 125). It is a duty, therefore, in the first place, on account of the uncertainty which attaches to them, to leave these things unmentioned, or at least to place them in the background.

A second consideration makes this duty still more imperative. For no one can deny that not a few of our contemporaries—whether they do so rightly or wrongly is entirely unessential in this connection—regard these things with a suspicion which would inevitably become a serious impediment in the way of their faith in the saving gospel of Christ, the moment these elements were included as an inseparable part of that gospel. And it seems to me that the Lord who reproached the scribes because they laid unbearable burdens upon the shoulders of their disciples will honor the fidelity which, even for the sake of seekers after salvation, declares it to be a duty not to include in the gospel, as an inseparable part of it, things which are not only by their nature separable from it and uncertain, but which are, moreover, liable to become a cause of offense.

It is with a good conscience, then, that I champion the definition of the gospel of the Reformation which I have already given.

Is this gospel of the Reformation today still *the* gospel? Can

it still serve as the banner for theologians who desire to help men of the present into a clear faith in God? Or has it become antiquated? With this I have now arrived at the real theme of my discussion.

I shall deal unevasively with all difficulties. It cannot be denied that the limitations of Luther—arising from the conditions of his time—are evident, not only in other things which did not stand in a constant and intrinsic relation to the gospel as he understood it, but also in those which did so stand. Luther's conception of the gospel itself is closely connected with a series of ideas which at that time were easily explained, but which are much more foreign to modern times—I might even say, which have to no small degree lost standing with men of the present day. But this last-mentioned fact does not in itself prove that the gospel is antiquated. Throughout the centuries Gods' truth has become in any age that has accepted it a conception of the time. That the gospel of the Reformation took on the forms of thought peculiar to that age does not disprove its divine character. It may be our age that is wrong in its tendencies and views. But if the present age is right in its tendencies and views, then the gospel of the Reformation is not divine truth; and we shall be obliged either to plow anew, or to cast aside the plow and see what the soil of this world may bring forth of itself. If I judge the case rightly, the considerations which make the gospel of the Reformation as foreign, not to say offensive, to the present age as it was self-evident to the sixteenth century, are fourfold. The first is the dependent relationship of man to God, presupposed by the gospel of the Reformation, or, rather, to speak more accurately, by the reformers; the second, the fundamental stress which it lays on the remission of sins; the third, the conditioning of this remission upon the death of Christ; and the fourth, the supernaturalistic interpretation of history by the reformers, especially with reference to the person of Christ.

Turning now to a discussion of the first point, certainly the sixteenth century was not without men who actually lived, like the heathen, "without God," and yet that age was as certain of

the fact that there is a God to whom men must give an account as it was of death. Luther considers it self-evident "that every man should desire to conduct himself so that he may become pious (well pleasing to God) and may attain unto eternal bliss" (Erlanger Ausgabe², 16, 251), and this supposition furnishes the starting-point for his gospel of the Reformation. The question which this gospel answers, namely, How shall I get into a *right* relation to God?, seemed to the reformers a question whose meaning and urgency must be plain to every man. Who can deny that the disposition of the present time in this respect differs materially from that of the sixteenth century? I have now in mind not only theoretical and practical atheists, although the number of the latter is not inconsiderable. But think, in the first place, for a moment of the middle classes in our cities. Here there are to be found thousands of men who seldom enter the doors of a church, perhaps never except on a great holiday. In their homes the last remnants of Christian family customs have disappeared; grace at meat, or family worship, are things unknown; reading matter is supplied by the daily newspaper. Now, it is not hostility to the church which causes all this—in very many cases it is not even consciously harbored doubt. The fact is simply this, that men thoughtlessly lose themselves in the secular interests of life, in the hot chase of business on working days, and the quest for pleasure on Sundays. Side by side with these things operate imperceptibly (though we can name the channels through which they work: our newspapers, the theater, the observation of other circles of society) the same factors which produce the corresponding disposition in the higher ranks of the people. Here, side by side with the all-engrossing material interests of life, modern culture exerts an enervating influence. But to think only of the natural sciences in this connection would again be altogether superficial. We have to consider the enlargement of the whole circle of vision which modern culture brings with it, including an undoubtedly refined moral sensibility and tact. People know something about history; they know what significance religions which have now disappeared once had; they know that the

pious Mohammedan is just as firmly convinced of the truth of his religion as is the Christian; that the Catholic is just as zealous in his Mariolatry as the faithful Protestant is in his belief in Christ. People see through the political cunning of the Catholic church, and for this very reason ascribe the same cunning to conservative Protestant circles; although it must also be admitted that this latter judgment is in many instances arrived at on the basis of personal experience. They have reason to appreciate the excellent characters of men who profess no religion, while even among those who consider themselves pious they find vanity, uncharitableness, intellectual narrowness, untruthfulness, selfish ambition, and the like. The things which they read, newspapers as well as books, have no Christian interest, if, indeed, they are not actually anti-Christian; in the social life, belief or unbelief plays no part whatever; Christianity is regarded only as on a level with everything else that has ever served in the world as the religious embellishment of this life. All sense of personal dependence of thought and life upon God has been absolutely lost. Against all this it is very convenient—but equally stupid—merely to declaim, in the style of the preacher of repentance, out of a quiet corner of the parsonage.

One must form a clear conception of how difficult it is for the individual to withdraw himself from these influences. Do we not feel them ourselves? When we consider what is so deplorable in the condition of the church at the present time, the narrow fanaticism of large circles in the church, the unscrupulousness which such circles show in the choice of their weapons, the diplomacy, the political methods which play a part in matters ecclesiastical, the low Byzantinism which is asserting itself among us, together with the painful fact that much-lauded pillars of the church or of ecclesiastical organizations, viewed near at hand, have, in many cases, exhibited very plain moral defects—when we consider all these things, and look at them in connection with the part which has been played by the clergy of all times, I ask: Are we not ourselves sometimes seriously tempted to unbelief? We are stayed by the inheritance of experience; we are brought

back from such distractions by our calling and our established ancestral customs. But if we wish to estimate how these impressions operate upon thousands of others, we must think of them as deprived of these restraining influences. When we travel we see the same hurry and bustle at the railway stations on Sunday as on weekdays, and observe thousands of people who seem to have not the remotest idea of religious needs; when we consider the sphere of interest of circles in society with which we come in less frequent contact, and their ideas of what constitutes the enjoyment of life; when we perceive how, under the corrupting influence of modern life, our good old Christian customs are being destroyed even in our quiet mountain valleys; when we appreciate the fact that in the gold-grabbing haste to be rich we are shutting our eyes to the pictures of distress down in the cellar-homes of the cities; when we perceive what a mighty power the Church of Rome still exerts upon the life of the people throughout large districts of our fatherland, not only in spite of, but largely by means of, her baseless superstition; only when we realize all these things can we estimate how those men think and feel who have hitherto been without any religious experience whatever, and who are tossed about on the sea of modern existence without the guidance of tradition, of calling, or of customs, to direct them into the channel of a religious life. Then, truly, we can understand the fact that so many men of the present day lack all sense of relationship to God. What place has the gospel of the Reformation here, a gospel which presupposes such a relationship, which seems to take it for granted that the question, "What must I do to be saved?", must move the human heart? Is it not antiquated? Only a superficial judgment could answer in the affirmative. For to the thoughts about God which precede the faith in the gospel Luther certainly attached little value. He was filled with the conviction that all faith in God that is worthy of the name must have its origin in the experience of the remission of sins. The Augustana (Art. II) says of the natural man, *i. e.*, the man who has not yet been born again through the grace of God, that he is *sine metu dei, sine fiducia erga deum*. Can the fact that this circumstance asserts itself even more strikingly and

undeniably now than it did in the sixteenth century render the gospel antiquated? Certainly not, provided that the gospel of the Reformation, though having lost in the minds of many of our contemporaries all possibility of connection with an external ecclesiastical organization, and with the fear of God's wrath and eternal punishment, shall not lack other points of contact with the ideas of modern life.

But this "provided that" would seem to lead only to a further and still greater difficulty. The gospel of the Reformation *est proprie promissio remissionis peccatorum propter Christum*. The remission of sins is Luther's pivotal thought. "There is no greater sin," says he (Weimar ed., II, 717, 33), "than that one should not believe in the remission of sins;" and even in our childhood we have learned from the catechism that "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and happiness." Where the significance of this remission is not understood, there can be no understanding of the gospel of the Reformation. Does this not present a dark outlook for the position of the old gospel in relation to the present? In spite of all its religious indifference, our age is still not without susceptible points of contact for religion: it is not a happy age. In moods of depression and melancholy a yearning after peace pervades the souls of men, and in the time of suffering they, more than the men of the sixteenth century, feel the burden of the enigma of life. On the moral side, too, there are points of contact to be found. But modern men do not understand the fundamental emphasis upon the remission of sins; to them the tirades of the Roman church against the dangers of such remission seem more reasonable, from a moral point of view, than the disposition to consider unbelief in such remission as the worst of sins. And of the points of contact with religion which we find in the present age, none seems to provide a connecting link with the gospel of the Reformation.

And yet the state of affairs is not so bad as it might seem. To be sure, we must admit that a yearning for peace and a desire for comfort in suffering do not lead by any direct road to evangelical faith; for the gospel knows no peace, no consolation in

suffering and death, where the *remissio peccatorum* is not understood and believed. But this is nothing to be deplored. On the contrary, it is a noble trait of the gospel of the Reformation which we should never deny, however often it may be denied by some. Genuine evangelical Christianity never consents to be misused as the sentimentally æsthetic gilding of shallow living. It offers no balm of consolation for pain and death, which, like the Roman Catholic mass for the dead, could be magically applied. Neither can modern culture fail to acknowledge this nobility of evangelical Christianity. That such use of religion is even today possible to a very large extent in spite of all our enlightenment, and not only, I am sorry to say, in Catholic circles, simply shows how inconsistent, and, in spite of all its pride of culture, how unstable and despondent, the modern human heart is. But modern culture, when it thinks soberly and apprehends clearly its own ideals, acknowledges that here the gospel is in the right. So that our difficulty is reduced to the fact that that which I mentioned as the third connecting point of contact for religion with our modern tendency of thought, namely, the moral ideals and interests of modern culture, seems rather to be repelled than attracted by the gospel of the remission of sins. But here again the appearance is deceptive. To be sure, thus much is indisputable: *evangelium est proprie promissio remissionis peccatorum*. But the *prædicare remissionem peccatorum* is not of necessity the first thing with which the evangelical sermon has to begin; nor is the *accipere remissionem peccatorum* on the part of the hearers its ultimate object. The comprehension of the second point is of particular importance for our time, and is a prerequisite for a proper utilization of the first. Therefore I shall begin with it.

There was a time, it is true, when the Protestant doctrine of justification was liable to be misinterpreted—and that, too, not merely by those who were hostile to it—as though it were the final object of God's plan concerning us to hold us sinners free from the charge of our sins and to attribute to us the active righteousness of Christ as our own. Since the proposition that no one has ever been saved without good works (*Form. conc.*, 591, 16) was denied; since Flacius expressed the opinion, in

opposition to Major, that the majority of men are converted only upon their death-beds, such misinterpretations were almost inevitable. Yet they are misinterpretations nevertheless. If we should endeavor to explain Luther's fundamental thoughts in the light of the Scripture passages which he cited with particular frequency, which were above all others his guiding stars, this verse would have to occupy a very prominent place: A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Either make the tree good and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt (Matt. 7:17; 12:33). "Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good works"—how many times Luther expressed this thought! We are justified, indeed, before God only through faith, and this faith means for us simply the renunciation of all self-righteousness, casting ourselves humbly upon the mercy of God, in which attitude of heart nothing could be more remote from us than to think of our faith (which was always regarded by Luther as a *donum dei*) as being man's *qualitas* wherewith to satisfy God's exacting justice. But this very faith constitutes one *persona justa coram deo*, and this *persona justa* can and must do good works. Such a one *can* do them, because faith makes the heart confiding, childlike, happy, new, and pure, and good works must be done out of a glad, childlike heart; he *must*, because the heart that has been reopened to God in faith cannot help reflecting his holy will. From the beginning Luther's thoughts were determined not only by the desire for pardon, but also by a hungering after righteousness in the moral sense. And it is an essential fact respecting his conception of the gospel that he did not separate these two ideas, but rather combined them into one. The gospel taught him both where pardon is to be found and how we may become qualified for truly good works. When he states in the explanation of the third article of the larger catechism (*Libri symbol.*, 497, 41) that the Holy Spirit sanctifies us through the forgiveness of sins, this statement can be rightly interpreted only when we do justice also to the thought to which Melanchthon gives expression in the Apologia: "*bona opera nonsolum requirimus, sed etiam ostendimus, quomodo fieri possint*" (*ibid.*, 85, 14). This touches the point

at which it is possible to establish a connection with the moral interests of the present age, viz., by comparing the ideals of a morality which has its origin and development in the Christian faith with modern moral ideals. There will be found to be more positive points of contact than negative, and the more carefully we avoid meaningless phraseology, that is, the more we guard against treating Christian and moral conceptions as fixed and known quantities without regard to their psychologico-ethical explanation, the more certainly will such a promulgation of the gospel appeal to the consciences of men of today.

But someone may say that this representation of the moral, or, more accurately, of the ethico-religious, ideal of evangelical piety is, according to the judgment of the reformers, in no sense the preaching of the gospel, but the preaching of the law. Even if this were true, the objection need not be feared. For the true preaching of the gospel is certainly not bound to begin everywhere and always with the *prædicare evangelium*. True, Luther did so in 1517, after a certain fashion. But at a later time (*Disputationen*, ed. Drews, 477) he opposed Agricola with the argument that changed times demand changed methods; that in 1517 the whole world had been in terror over its sins, for which reason it had not been necessary to preach the law, the times needing rather the consolation of the gospel; that the self-confident and wicked men among whom they were now living (1538), these Epicureans who feared neither God nor man, these had to be judged in a different manner. Moreover, even from the point of view of the reformers, it is not an out-and-out preaching of the law to attempt to delineate to our hearers a morality developed out of the remission of sins; according to Luther's later views, and in a certain sense according to what he always regarded as right, it is, to use the terminology of the sixteenth century, the preaching of that combination of law and gospel with which it is our duty to begin.

Where such a proclamation of the gospel gives a man an insight into his own moral imperfection, and the fact presses itself upon him that God's holy will is behind the ideal with its claims, the sense of his indebtedness to God will begin to assert itself;

here, then, an understanding of the gospel, in the most restricted sense of the term, of the *promissio remissionis peccatorum*, becomes possible. The fact that this process does not take place in all those who recognize the moral ideal of Christianity as an ideal does not characterize the present more than it did the past, for even Luther, in the sixteenth century, declared himself unable to determine the causes of this state of affairs. We can readily understand how faith grows and where it grows: the man upon whom the ideal of Christian morality has really gained a hold as an ideal for him feels at the same time the obligation of a personal relationship to God; he feels something of the claims of the divine will; and he is then able, through the emancipating experience of the remission of sins, to arrive at a real faith in the living God. We can see, furthermore, that this development fails to take place largely on account of the fact that men only half recognize these ideals. They recognize them, not as ideals for themselves, but only for those who still retain their faith in God. Sometimes such failure is due to the circumstance that men play with their ideals—and how prone men are to do this! Still, we must admit that in many cases the primary, and in every case the ultimate, reason for the diversified conduct of men toward the ideal of Christian morality which they have recognized must remain hidden from us. But, as I have already said, it has never been otherwise. Let it suffice that even today the way to the faith which we have had under discussion is not barred. The gospel, as far as we have hitherto discussed it, is after all not less intelligible to men of the present than it was to men of the sixteenth century, not less intelligible to the European than to the catechumens of our missionaries. The ways by which we may attain to such an understanding are various; but finally the whole matter resolves itself into the very simple elements of which our Lord treated in the parable of the prodigal son, so simply that a child cannot fail to grasp them. Just now there is a tendency to exaggerate the differences of men and of times, a tendency which might be compared to the folly of obscuring a picture with arabesque. Just as love and fidelity, after all, appeal to the hearts of men today in no other way than of old, so it is with guilt and

pardon. The gospel of the forgiveness of sins not only points us, even yet, to a possible way by which we may reach the right faith in God, but to the only possible way. I do not intend by any means to assert by this that there is but one form of conversion. I am well aware that no program of experience can do justice to the diversified life and experiences of the human heart, but I merely desire to protest against erroneous differentiations. No man can truly know God who does not know him as the Holy One and the Merciful. But only he can know him as such who understands also the meaning of guilt and pardon. This understanding may, so far as the feelings are concerned, assume widely divergent modes of manifestation. Do not the same notes produce quite another tone when played upon the violin than when struck upon a bell? Does it not make a vast difference whether they are played alone or with a full accompaniment? And yet they are, after all, the self-same notes.

This brings me to the third point which we have to discuss. I have characterized as irrelevant all these differences of feeling which variously express men's experience of guilt and pardon. But it happens sometimes at the present day that among such irrelevant differences is reckoned the fact that in some instances the experience of forgiveness is inseparably bound up with the belief in Christ's death for us, while in others men think themselves justified in emancipating such experience from that traditional Christian idea. Many in their attempts to modernize Christianity believe themselves obliged to do so. To accept this latter view, and to judge the *propter Christum* as unessential adornment, simply implies the assertion that the gospel of the Reformation, in its genuine form, has become antiquated. For in the gospel of the Reformation, as a matter of fact, not only is the *remissio* invariably thought of as *remissio propter Christum*, but the reformers considered this *propter Christum* as absolutely indispensable, as the very core of the gospel. Accordingly a two-fold question presents itself for discussion: Has it become untenable to base the *remissio* on the *opus Christi*, and can this basis really be dispensed with? Men have declared these Reformation

ideas to be untenable, partly on the strength of what they believe they have ascertained in regard to primitive Christianity, and partly under appeal to more general religio-historical arguments.

An adequate discussion of the objections of the first sort would be entirely impossible, even if it were a matter of detail in historical exegesis, which it is not. We have to deal here, not with the details of historical exegesis, but with its underlying premises. If, indeed, it is a justifiable principle in New Testament biblical theology to regard the simpler thoughts, those thoughts more closely related to Old Testament piety, as the oldest, and from this starting-point to proceed to a grouping of sources, not only in regard to their date, but also in regard to their interdependence, then the alleged results are also valid, and in that case we may assert that the bringing of remission into causal connection with the death of Christ, if not as late as St. Paul, is at all events, as compared with that which is primitive, an illegitimate conception; that, as is claimed, this later conception has exerted an obscuring influence upon the transmission of the words of Christ, for example, concerning the "ransom for many" (Matt. 20: 28), and at the institution of the Lord's supper; and, moreover, that when we find, not only in the deutero-Pauline letters and in Hebrews, but also in 1 Peter and in the Johannine literature, the expression of thoughts which are cognate with the Pauline valuation of Christ's death, we have to explain such thoughts as due to Pauline influence. But we must not forget that these alleged results of historical exegesis stand or fall with their premises. And I can find no valid argument or cogent analogy to support these premises or to justify their acceptance. And, on the other side, the arguments to the contrary are weighty. Paul and the celebration of the Lord's supper in primitive Christian churches furnish us with chronologically the oldest testimony to the valuation of the death of Jesus in ancient Christianity. Therefore to consider their valuation of Christ's death as illegitimate—I use the term "illegitimate," not "secondary," because I do not wish to exclude the idea of a gradual development of a right understanding of the significance of the Last Supper in the *earliest* Christian community—

to consider, I say, this valuation as illegitimate would, in my opinion, be justifiable only if we were compelled to do so. But wherein lies the compulsion? Is it to be found in the fact that the Old Testament piety of prophetic times, and even later than that, the Psalms, speak of forgiveness without any sacrifice? Was it then *inevitable* that Christ and the apostles should confine themselves within the limits of such views? What precludes the possibility that new experiences added a new thought to these old ideas? Now, if we may attach any value at all to what is certainly the primitive as well as the universal Christian estimate of Old Testament development as one preparatory to redemption, and if the law is later than the prophets, I fail to see how we could conceive of a preparation for the *gratia in Christo* in any other way than as we have it. Even without the untenable assumption of a *fides in venturum Christum*, the penitential psalms will permit of interpretation in the light of the saying: *vetus testamentum in novo patet*. And what about the gospels, with "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors," their parable of the prodigal son, their accounts of the assurances of pardon which Christ expressed without any reference to his work of atonement? For centuries they have been regarded as not in contradiction to St. Paul; and therefore—to speak mildly—it might even be considered possible that their authors thought as Paul did concerning the death of Jesus. Even though they did thus agree with Paul, they would have had no opportunity, when transmitting the sayings of Christ, to develop a *theologia crucis*. But, does anyone ask, is not this very fact decisive enough, namely that, aside from Matt. 20:28, his words at the institution of the Supper, and a few passages in John, the sayings of Christ have nothing in common with the later valuation of his death? He only can think so who strikes out those few passages—few in number, but present nevertheless—and who forgets that the simple words of Jesus, "Thy sins are forgiven," brought consolation, and the parable of the prodigal son carried a positive teaching, to his hearers only on condition that they trusted in him who spoke these things. Even before his death Christ was to his disciples the guarantee, the security, for the forgiveness

of sins, the basic foundation of their faith in it. That the crucified and risen Lord should after his resurrection be all this in a much higher degree to his disciples, who in the meantime had become more mature, can be explained readily enough on purely psychological grounds. And I am convinced that our sources not only do not forbid us to regard the *remissio propter Christum* in this sense as a universal thought of primitive Christianity, but they actually require it. This, then, confirms the statement that historical exegesis has not rendered the gospel of the Reformation antiquated. For everyone who has learned to distinguish between theology and faith will concede that, as in St. Paul, so in the gospel of the Reformation, it is not a question of dogmatic interpretation of the *propter Christum*, but only of the *propter Christum* itself. Luther's ideas as to the nature of the process of *remissio* through Christ were manifold ; and, even today, when anyone has in real faith understood the *propter Christum*, according to his character and the degree of his culture and Scripture knowledge, that faith will find various intellectual forms of expression. None of the biblical modes of expression and none of Luther's forms of statement will be unintelligible to true faith, and the keynote of passion-hymns,

"Nun was du Herr erduldet, ist alles meine Last,"

will find an echo wherever faith puts its confidence only in the crucified Lord. But all this does not alter the fact that not various interpretations, but the *propter Christum* itself, is the essential matter. Whether this *propter Christum* should be interpreted from the point of view of a sacrificial system, or from that of a theory of substitution ; whether the necessity for the death of Christ proceeded directly and solely from God, or whether it was influenced by the consideration that only by such means our faith could be secured against a light estimate of sin : these are dogmatic questions. For our faith the *propter Christum* is the only essential thing ; nor do the results of historical exegesis hinder us from preaching this fact to the present age, with the same good conscience with which the reformers preached it to theirs.

But do not the more general considerations which are derived

from the history of religion forbid such preaching? In an earnest conversation about the significance of the gospel for our times, I once appealed to the fact that the piety of the heroes of faith in our church is inseparable from their faith in the Savior, and I was met with the reply that in the Catholic church Christian piety is just as inseparable from faith in the virgin Mary. Now, I ask, must we regard faith in the mediatorial office of Jesus merely as an amplification of the faith in the forgiveness of sins, which, according to the analogies of the history of religion, was certain to come about, but which is merely a crutch worthless in itself, and useful only for people with devotional needs; must we accept this view of faith simply because we find the idea of pardon through sacrifice and through the meritorious deeds of others to be present also among non-Christian peoples, and because in the Roman church a hollow confidence in the Virgin and the saints exerts a similar quieting influence? The answer may be very brief. The trust in the pure *mater dolorosa* and the trust in the saints are later imitations of the faith in the Savior, without any added content. They represent, not independent developments of human thought analogous to faith in the Savior, but dependent modifications of it. And the quieting influence which even this erroneous faith is able to exert—and I will not deny that it does sometimes exert such an influence—is easily understood when we consider that it retains the definitive thought of the true faith while effecting a substitution merely of persons—we might almost say, merely of names—but not of content. And as long as true simplicity of heart has this substitution thrust upon it, we shall find here and there the verification of God's word (Isa. 65:1): "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, Behold me, unto a nation that hath not called upon my name." Finally, the analogies in non-Christian circles can be considered analogies only in regard to the most general basic ideas of belief in the mediatory office of Christ; they prove nothing more than that the human heart, burdened with guilt within, naturally yearns for something without upon which it may rest its confidence and trust in forgiveness.

If this yearning is natural, is it also justifiable or necessary? Should not our more vigorous age cast aside its crutches and stand alone upon the great mercy of God? We shall be able to answer this question when we recognize the truth that the *propter Christum* is something else than a crutch, that it is still today indispensable as the rock upon which our feet must be placed if we would not be whirled away by the waves of despondency on the one hand or of frivolity on the other. Our trust in the remission of sins involves a moral danger. Does it not evidence a greater moral earnestness when a man is unable to forget the burden of his sins? And yet, how can he act cheerfully when, instead of striving after that which is before, he turns back in dismal thought to the place where he fell? Only the faith in the *remissio propter Christum* can lead us out of this dilemma. He who accepts the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake may forget his sins and all that is behind. But he will not esteem them lightly, for he knows too well "the price Christ paid for our redemption." And the more we feel this, the more will our grateful love increase toward Him who gave himself for us; and the greater this love, the greater will also be our zeal to continue in his footsteps. And thus our forgetting of our sins not only does not become a temptation to frivolity, but it does become indirectly an incentive to the struggle against sin. This wonderful interdependent mingling of joyous oblivion and grateful recollection of sin, of despair of self and courageous trust, of the death of the old nature and the new life of faith—this wonderful intermingling to which Paul Gerhardt's lines give expression:

An mir und meinem Leben
Ist nichts auf dieser Erd,
Was Christus mir gegeben,
Das ist der Liebe wert,

—this is the deepest and most heart-felt testimony for the truth of the gospel, for the imperishable significance of the *propter Christum*, which in the minds of the reformers is inseparable from the *promissio remissionis*.

But does our age understand this *propter Christum*? I purposely avoid narrowing the question down to any particular

doctrine of atonement. For, although I am positive, as I have already stated, that every believer will, as his faith develops, form a detailed conception of the process of the remission of sins through Christ, after all we are dealing here only with the fundamental principle. And wherever this is received into the heart, it matters not in how primitive a form, there we may speak of faith in the sense of the gospel of the Reformation. Does our age, then, comprehend this *propter Christum*? I fail to see any reason why the present should not comprehend it as readily as did the past, unless it be that the placing of Jesus in his extraordinary position above all other men, which undoubtedly is in every respect one of the premises of the *remissio propter Christum*, should prove such a hindrance.

But it is this very hindrance which constitutes the last difficulty that obscures the understanding of the old gospel in our times. And this last difficulty is the most important. It could not have been difficult for Luther and his contemporaries to regard the *remissio peccatorum*, for us and for all men, as conditioned upon the person and the work of Christ, and, therefore, to see in him the pivotal point of all time. From the days of their childhood the whole field of biblical story was to them a well-authenticated wonderland. Its central figure was the Lord, the eternal Son of God made man, whom angels accompanied to earth, whom angels waited upon as he ascended to heaven, a Lord over sickness, pain, and death, who revealed his glory in ministering to others, a Lord over death and the grave, even in his victorious resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God's majesty. How different all this is now! The present, so far as it is the conscious representative of modern thought, will have nothing to do with happenings, either now or in the past, which are conditioned upon the supernatural. It believes that it has discovered the laws of nature which govern occurrences in the physical world, and posits analogous laws for psychic life; it recognizes no process that does not conform to the laws which are immanent in our world. Accordingly, our modern scientific history-writing is naturalistic. Not in the sense, at least as a rule, that it denies the existence of a reality

outside of and above nature — its work furnishes it with no occasion for the expression of such dogmatic naturalism — but in the sense that, in its conception of the method in which this reality works, it is naturalistic. It has to deal only with material which it is able to recognize empirically (out of the rescued remains of the past) as having once existed, and it associates with this recognition of the once-existent the thinkableness of its natural origin. Where, then, is there room in history for the reformers' conception of the Savior? It would seem as though the whole religious view of history, which must regard the living God as the sovereign Lord of nature, even historically, were here deprived of its basis.

But it surely cannot be considered my task to include in this discussion the full consideration of the question that arises out of this condition of things, the question, namely, as to the right of the old supernaturalism. I shall enter into it only so far as my theme requires it. Does the difference of the times, of which we have been speaking, render a hearty acceptance of the gospel of the Reformation impossible? Does it dispel the hope that the gospel of the Reformation is still, for our own times, *the* gospel? I answer, No!

This confidence of mine is founded neither on the possibility of reconciling the religious view of history with the naturalistic, nor on the hope of seeing these two views existing peaceably side by side on the basis of a tolerant separation, but upon the conviction that to modern men also, if they but ponder the matter deeply enough, the necessity for a clear decision in favor of supernaturalism, as concerning the person of Christ, will become evident.

We find the reconciliation of the religious view of history with the naturalistic attempted in the effort to measure the significance of Jesus by the help of a term not unfamiliar to historical science, viz., the term *genius*. The enigma of his person, then, resolves itself into a special case of the inconceivability of men of genius in general. This attempt at a harmonizing of antagonistic views is attended with the difficulty, in the first place, that the conception of genius may take on three different forms. It may,

in the first place, be conceived on purely naturalistic lines; for even an atheistic naturalism may admit that personalities of true genius are to our comprehension incommensurable quantities. In the second place, it may be brought into relation with thoughts of the divine, without, however, abandoning the idea of its natural origin. Lastly, it may take on a supernatural character, if we accept the view that new creations of genius owe their ultimate origin, not to those things which are the intellectual conditions of the existence of genius, but to a special divine force entering from without. Furthermore, each of these three phases is open to particular objections. I need not mention that in the first case even the broadest use of the term "genius" must fail to satisfy religious interests; the antagonistic views are not, in fact, harmonized in this way; we have simply charitably covered up the nakedness of an irreligious naturalism with a word. But in the second case also, that is, when attention is called expressly to the consideration that it is God who raises up heroes in the spiritual world, even then the religious element is deprived of its "vital air." To be sure, in this case the conception of genius, as applied to Jesus, is more than a mere expression to cover a bare naturalism; here we really have an attempt to harmonize the old thoughts and the new. For, it is claimed, the interests of faith cannot attach to the manner in which God enters into the process, whether directly or according to divinely established natural causes; and we have satisfied the claims of these interests when we recognize the natural development proceeding under divinely instituted laws, as being ordered and sustained by the living God. But when this view is taken, does God then really remain the "living" God? I am confident that for some who hold this view he does. For I know that in the minds of speculative theologians this view, when associated with profound dogmatical considerations concerning the relation of the eternal God to time, of his *providentia* to human liberty, may exist side by side with a firm faith in the living God. But not all other men live amid the dizzy abstractions which view the course of time *sub specie æternitatis*. We have to consider those also whose minds are limited to a more circumscribed, vulgar view of history, and for

them the theory of a natural development, divinely ordered, will result either in a deistic emptiness of faith, or in obscure pantheistic mysticism. If this were the only possible solution of the difficulty, the gospel would have no place in modern intellectual life.

Far better are the chances of the religious interests in the third case. This may be discussed simultaneously with a second theory for the harmonizing of these contrasts, a theory which virtually amounts to the same thing, although it makes use of more strictly theological terminology. According to this theory all heart-felt religion rests upon revelation, upon a comprehension of God by man. In the heroes of religion this comprehension has been realized in a higher measure than in those who merely follow the thoughts of such heroes, and corresponding to the gradation of religions there is also a gradation of intensity of revelation. Do these suggestions really succeed in harmonizing the religious view with the naturalistic? Do they give free course to the gospel in our modern world? If a pantheistic theory is taken as their background, then the interests of modern naturalism are preserved. But in that case it is too plain to need proof that Christian religious experience will be stripped of its most essential premises. If the thought of a personal God is retained, then we have a real adjustment of naturalistic and religious interests, an adjustment which, in the sphere of physical phenomena, concedes to naturalism its rights, and at the same time recognizes in the sphere of intellectual life an undeniable influence of the supernatural upon natural phenomena. And, according to the breadth which we attribute to this influence, we make room, if not for the genuine gospel of the Reformation, at least for a modernizing reinterpretation of it. And wherever in such a reinterpretation the definitive character of divine revelation in Christ receives its due, wherever there is in the heart a living faith in the *remissio propter Christum* and a hope of eternal life founded upon his conquest of death—where these conditions prevail in men's hearts, far be it from me to affirm that the intellectual surrender of the *plus* of biblical ideas which I have retained over and above those which they hold, is for them a *minus* in their personal Christianity.

But, after all, if this solution of the difficulties were the only possible one, we should still be unable to answer the question of our theme unconditionally in the negative. For a whole-hearted "Christ is risen" undoubtedly belongs to the gospel of the Reformation. Moreover, it seems to me that the position of a gospel thus modernized is in our modern world by no means unassailable. Its connection with the faith, with the *credere* of our fathers, by which even the modern mind is instinctively impressed, is weakened, while receiving no scientific reinforcement to compensate for this weakening of its position. From the one side we shall hear the objection that supernaturalism in the domain of intellect is just as irrational, just as untenable, as a supernaturalism which sets aside the natural laws of physical existence; and from the other it will be objected, and I think rightly, that proscribing supernaturalism in the sphere of physical phenomena, while at the same time rejecting naturalism in the realm of spirit, is an inconsistency. May we not suppose that here, too, connecting lines may be drawn from the physical sphere to that of spirit? But who will undertake to draw these lines and establish the limits to which they shall run? What do we know concerning the relation between the incorporeal and the corporeal? And in this case the incorporeal, the spiritual, with whose ultimate influence upon the physical we are now dealing, is, at the same time, the divine!

Neither upon this nor upon any other attempt at harmonizing the religious view of history with the naturalistic do I base my confidence that the old gospel of the Reformation even for our age has not yet lost its savor.

But neither do I base it upon the supposition that these two views of history could be brought to exist peaceably side by side, under the truce of tolerant separation, assigning to one the religious sphere and to the other that of science as its absolute domain. I think, of course, that one of these two sides, namely, the side of science, can and must tolerate such a coexistence of these views. It must do so, because the science of history cannot adopt the religious view of history; faith and knowledge are two different things. We Christians, too, have to content

ourselves with the empirically established, in the work of scientific history ; divine agency cannot be introduced into historical representations as a factor in empirically established phenomena. And science *can* tolerate such coexistence, for even the most consistently naturalistic science of history may recognize its limitations in the matter of religious faith. Science can leave room for the existence, side by side with it, of a supernaturalistic, religious view of history, if, at the point where its own method proves insufficient, science is conscientious enough to admit its own inadequacy in ascertaining the facts of the past. On the other side, however, on the side of religion, such coexistence of the two views cannot, in my estimation, pass as the final conclusion of wisdom. It is not altogether incorrect, of course, to say that for religious faith in itself it is immaterial how the Lord God has proven himself and still proves himself sovereign Lord of nature ; whether by dealings such as we are continually able to observe in the world, or by means that are without analogy. And it is conceivable that in a religious estimate of the person of the historic Christ a mind accustomed to abstractions might succeed in refraining altogether from reflections as to the natural explicability or inexplicability of that historic figure. Nevertheless, a twofold consideration renders it impossible for the religious view of history to ignore the dilemma between naturalism and supernaturalism. In the first place we have the universal desire for a unified theory of existence. To be sure, those of us who are accustomed to abstract speculations may allow the naturalistic view of history to follow its own course parallel to the religious method of interpretation, without thereby endangering the unity of our theory of life. For the essential question for us in regard to history is how much of the past is scientifically *knowable*. But for the layman history has a different significance. No matter what degree of knowledge may determine his judgment, for him history includes everything that he accepts as having actually taken place. This view of history is either dogmatically naturalistic or supernaturalistic. Even for this reason alone it is impossible for theology to tolerate the coexistence of the religious and the naturalistic views with regard

to the historic figure of Jesus. Theology must recognize the fact that, because the religious view of history must become for each individual the frame, as it were, for a unified conception of history, it must also arrive at a decision between naturalism and supernaturalism. Corresponding to an obligatory reserve on the part of naturalistic research in regard to the things which its methods are unable to measure up, we have, on the side of the religious interpretation of history, a justifiable reaching over into the work of ascertaining the facts of the past. The second element in the twofold consideration which I have mentioned is this: even if an abstract method of thought should succeed in refraining from reflections as to the explicability or inexplicability of the historical figure of Jesus, as applied to the gospel of the risen Lord such restraint becomes impossible. Here our decision for or against a fact premised by the gospel becomes absolutely inseparable from our decision between naturalism and supernaturalism. And it seems to me that this stumbling-stone for modern men has been put in the way *non sine numine*; for even the simplest mind can see that the Christian faith deals with things that are above and beyond the nature which limits us. If this faith is to make us "wholly free men," as Luther puts it, then it must also give us the guarantee that we shall be free from the natural law of death, and from all the other laws of this perishable world which now enslave us. If we accept this without the belief in Christ's bodily resurrection, we are simply thrusting the question of God's power over nature farther back, remanding it to a sphere in which it is even more impossible for us to grasp the conceptions of things than when dealing with the bodily resurrection. And to abandon entirely all recognition of God's power over nature and its laws is something which a true faith in the living God will never be able to do.

I am thus brought to the positive assertion that we are justified in hoping that men of the present will see the necessity of a clear decision for supernaturalism as regards the person of Jesus. This hope is justifiable for several reasons: by the reports which we possess concerning his deeds and experiences, particularly of his resurrection; by the fact that the belief in

Christ has, since the days of the apostles, evidenced its supramundane power in many thousands of men; and, lastly, by reason of what is known to us of the self-consciousness of Jesus. As respects the first point, I will not repeat here what I have said in another place² concerning the narratives of the resurrection. As respects the second, the testimony of the past to the influence exerted by the belief in Christ can only appeal to our feelings. I shall, therefore, limit myself to a consideration of the third argument, which is, moreover, the weightiest. The naturalistic view of history knows only men whose personality has its origin in a coöperation of natural talent with experience, talent which owes its origin to entirely natural laws, and experience which is also naturally conditioned. But these two elements so conditioned impose a temporal limitation upon the significance of any such personality. A naturalistic theory of history of necessity interprets everything as only relatively significant. That Jesus attributed to himself a significance for humanity exceeding these limits is proven by his assumption of the title of Messiah, and by a large number of the sayings of Christ which have been handed down to us; Matt. 5: 22, 26, 28; 10: 24, 37, 40; 11: 20 ff., 27; 12: 30; 13: 16 f.; 16: 17; 18: 11; 20: 28; 25: 35 ff.; 26: 28; cf. Jer. 31: 31 ff.; 26: 64; Luke 9: 26, 55 f.; 11: 22; 12: 49; John *passim*, cannot possibly be all of them later fictions. Consequently we must conclude, either that Jesus was a self-deluded fanatic, or that he is more than a link in the chain of naturally conditioned human history. This is the dilemma with which we find ourselves confronted in regard to the person of Jesus; we must choose between a relativism which gives him the lie, and a clear decision for supernaturalism. And so, if we only delineate Jesus with absolute fidelity, or, to use the words of St. Paul to the Galatians (3: 1), if we "evidently set forth Christ" before the eyes of our contemporaries, I am confident that modern men, too, will be convinced of the impossibility of estimating the person of Jesus on a naturalistic basis. But if at that point in the history of this little earth of ours the

² *Die Auferstehungsberichte und ihr Wert.* Hefte zur Christlichen Welt, No. 33. Freiburg, Leipzig, und Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1898.

Almighty interposed supernaturally in the development of humanity, who shall say that his influence is limited to the sphere of the psychical! A divine interposition in the course of human development which is not circumscribed by the chain of natural causes so far transcends all natural experience that, wherever we have to suppose such interposition, all the arguments of reason based only on natural experience are inadequate. I need not enter into the details of the supernaturalistic estimate of the person of Jesus. For if the mind has been brought to decide clearly in favor of supernaturalism in regard to the person of Christ, faith will not hesitate to acknowledge Christ's human life to be a definitive divine revelation. And I think I may take it for granted that this valuation of the person of Christ is unassailable by any theologian in the name of the science of historical exegesis. On the other hand, I should be little concerned if such valuation should be characterized as insufficient. In defining the old gospel in my introduction, I intentionally avoided all "cut and dried" christological formulas. For wherever the truth prevails that in the human personality and life of Jesus the eternal God himself has revealed himself to the world, there the gospel can be understood, and wherever this divine self-revelation is accepted in faith in the *remissio peccatorum propter Christum*, there the gospel is understood, and there the words of the Apologia apply: "*querere apud Christum remissionem peccatorum est summus cultus Christi; nihil possumus majus tribuere Christo*" (88, 33). Our own age is peculiarly able to incite us in reference to this matter to think great thoughts on great subjects. In the past, when the supernaturalistic theory of existence was a matter of course, dogmatic traditional formulas were necessary in order to establish the significance of the person of Jesus as above that of a prophet; they are still necessary in our day because, fortunately, modern methods of thoughts have not yet entirely driven out the naïve supernaturalistic view of history among the people; they are necessary, also, in order to prevent any pantheistic reinterpretation of God's revelation in Christ. But really modern thought will perceive that the Rubicon has been crossed when a self-revelation of

God in the person of Jesus without any naturalistic qualifications is acknowledged. All further christological formulas are, so far as truly modern thought is concerned, not a whit more irrational than such an acknowledgment, and only from the person of Christ as a starting-point will modern thought arrive at a supernaturalistic interpretation of the prophets and of all history. Therefore my theme does not call for a more detailed discussion of the question as to how far the old christological formulas may still be maintained.

But I have one more objection to meet. On January 9, 1771, Lessing wrote to Mendelssohn (Hempel, 20, 1, 400) expressing a fear that, in casting aside certain prejudices, he (Lessing) had cast aside a little too much, and some things which he would have to accept again; but that hitherto he had been prevented from reaccepting them by a fear that he might find himself "gradually dragging all the old rubbish into the house again." Similar thoughts occupy the minds of many modern men, and of not a few modern theologians. If I accept supernaturalism in one point, so they say, then I shall have to go back to a recognition of the whole supernaturalistic theory, with all its incredible miraculous stories which in the Scripture are set forth as facts, and this my conscience will not allow me to do. This objection has little to justify it, although it is unfortunately true that many are doing the very thing — to use the language of Lessing, "dragging the old rubbish into the house again"—to which those who raise this objection object. Thus arises very often what is termed modern orthodoxy, reminding one of that which Lessing says a little later in the passage already quoted: "For many minds the final goal of thought is the point at which they have become weary of thought." We should not become weary of thinking at this point. We can accept a phenomenon as supernatural only when we have cogent reasons for so doing. Thus one may experience the "power of the resurrection of Christ" (Phil. 3:10). No such inner corroboration is possible for any of the other miracles narrated of Jesus. To be sure, he who follows a truly

supernaturalistic method of thought may say : Faith will credit the Lord with such power. But a single miracle, as such, can never become the object of a faith for which one would "die a thousand deaths," even when no doubts exist as to the credibility of the story. And when the existence of such doubts cannot be denied, a man is not an infidel because he considers the report unhistorical. The present age cannot go back to the standpoint of a time in which historical criticism was unknown. It must not return to that standpoint, because the scientific conscience will not allow it to do so. It need not return to it, because faith is founded only upon the gospel. Indeed, the liberty which is born of faith must protest against seeing that faith bound to historical, or even biblical, traditions which are unessential to salvation.

Orthodoxy may perhaps urge in reply to this that criticism could be more easily tolerated if it were always accompanied by true belief ; but that unbelieving criticism—and who will deny that such exists?—must be repressed with might and main ; that he who loves the gospel must associate himself for this purpose with all who are like-minded. But this is not the spirit of the gospel. The gospel contains within itself its own verification and defense, says Zwingli in his Theses of 1523 ; it needs not the protection of man. Luther's desire was to fight *solo verbo*. And so it should be today. But the question is, after all, a profitless one, for not even the pope succeeds in suppressing unbelieving criticism outside of his church. The only pertinent question is to what extent we may invite the spiritual coöperation of those who seem to be affected by unbelieving criticism. But even in regard to this important question the gospel of the Reformation does not leave us unadvised. Faith in the gospel cannot be measured by formulated statements ; it is altogether a matter of our inmost being. Where is the dividing line between nascent belief and unbelief, between unbelief and a belief that is handicapped by prejudice of position and idiosyncrasy of character ? And again : it is the *word of God* which works in the heart, and not the belief of the preacher. Therefore the evangelical churches should accept the

coöperation of everyone who, in the measure of his knowledge and discernment, is willing to help in making way in our modern world for the gospel of Jesus Christ. I will not deny that such toleration has its limits; but these I have already indicated. And yet I wish to state distinctly that in my estimation we cannot possibly leave it in every case to the conscience of the individual to decide whether he is still serving the best interests of the gospel. As respects the ordinary work of the professors in our institutions of learning, such liberty seems to me justifiable and right. For we must avoid even the appearance of implying that the gospel needs any human safeguards against science. Moreover, all reprisals are ineffective; what would it avail us if we should request a professor to enter another faculty, or to resign? We cannot thereby silence his pen. David Friedrich Strauss did not become less influential by reason of the fact that he was prevented from entering on the professorship to which he had been elected at Zürich, but only more embittered. But in regard to the clergy and other like servants of the church, church governments are in duty bound—and in regard to the question of religious coöperation all individuals are likewise bound—to draw the line in accordance with their own judgment of the limits within which profitable coöperation is possible.

Where shall this line be drawn? The question is a much simpler one in America than in the established churches of the Old World. In America every denomination thinks it necessary to preserve its distinctive peculiarities, and expulsion from one denomination does not prevent the expelled member from uniting with another that is more congenial to him. But even in America there are already denominations situated similarly to our own, and for all American denominations this same problem presents itself as soon as the question of an interdenominational association is raised. Where, then, shall that line be drawn? In my opinion there is only *one* answer befitting the churches of the Reformation: it should be drawn at a point where a positive attachment to the gospel of the Reformation no longer exists, where its path is being *obstructed* instead of being made smooth. This line is a broad one, very broad; and yet it is narrow enough.

For what more does our own age need than the gospel? Among us in the Old World the question as to the limits of liberty of instruction, and among English-speaking people the question of Christian union, are being widely discussed. But that the gospel of the Reformation *alone* can and must be the basis of all spiritual coöperation, the basis of all Christian union, this thesis has been championed in its full breadth only by individuals here and there. Zealous attachment to the gospel of the Reformation has, as a rule, been bound up with a lot of untenable ideas concerning the restoration of primitive Lutheranism, or at least with a ballast of dogmatic traditions; and, on the other hand, the attempt to compromise with "modern thought" has too often entailed an enfeebling of religious energy. An honest, whole-souled, out-and-out fight *for* the gospel of the Reformation, and an equally determined fight *against* all obsolete tradition and dogma, *this* standard, I believe, would carry success with it in the modern world, such as no other watchword, whether traditionalistic or liberal, could hope for. And even though the victory of this banner were reserved for future generations, yet it will exalt, even now, every individual who rallies around it. Under this flag we need not ask to have the security of our position guaranteed by the state or its favor, or by partisan journals and conferences, or yet by the applause of irreligious science, or by the approval of "enlightened" periodicals and *salons*: here we stand upon a foundation laid by a higher hand, free on every side, and secure for time and for eternity.